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CAUSES AND EFFECTS: AN EXAMINATION OF LEGISLATIVE
PROFESSIONALISM AS AN INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLE IN
STATE LEGISLATURES

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts with
Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By
Alexandra M. Edelstein

* * * * *

Western Kentucky University
2012

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ABSTRACT

Professionalism's dual role as an independent and dependent variable makes the impact of its institutional characteristics on legislator attitudes and behavior important to understand. Professionalism affects the behavior and attitudes of the same legislators who control the strength of its characteristics through the policies they create. In this two-part study, I measure the influence of personal and contextual factors on legislator attitudes towards the adequacy of legislative professionalism in state legislatures. I then identify the effects of legislative professionalism on legislator allocation of time. I find that political (party) and personal (ambition) factors play the primary roles in shaping how legislators view the adequacy of professionalism in their legislatures. I also find that, while legislative professionalism does not significantly influence legislator attitudes towards professionalism, it does play an important role in determining the amount of time that legislators spend performing traditionally legislative activities, as well as the amount of time they would *like* to spend performing these activities. Overall, the legislators' observed sense of contentment with current levels of professionalism in this study suggests that the amount of time currently allocated to their legislative activities will not be changing drastically in the near future.

Keywords: Legislative Professionalism, State Legislatures, Legislator, Attitudes, Behavior, Ambition

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars of state politics generally view the increased professionalism of American state legislatures during the 1960s and 1970s as a significant institutional development (Malhotra 2008). Legislator compensation, session length, and the number of legislative staff all increased. This rise in professionalism occurred amidst concerns that amateur legislatures would be unable to meet the needs of their electorate (Miller 1965; Heard 1966). However, as legislatures became more professional, concern was expressed that professional legislators might be more likely to pursue their own professional interests than those of their constituents (Rosenthal 1989). Professionalism, as a concept, has been hypothesized to influence behavior of political actors within and outside of legislatures (Squire 2007). The degree of legislative professionalism can also shape the internal structure of a legislature, as well as its policy outputs. While many studies look at the effects of legislative professionalism on political outcomes, the extent to which a legislature is professional is also a policy output. Generally, legislators are able to help shape the degree to which the legislature is influenced.

Although a variety of specific measures have been used to measure legislative professionalism, they all reflect the same general concept. Professionalism is a concept that measures a state legislature's ability to "command the full attention of its members,

provide them with adequate resources to do their jobs in a manner comparable to that of other full-time political actors, and set up organizations and procedures that facilitate lawmaking” (Mooney 1995, 48-49). Initially, professionalism was measured relative to what were defined as ideal characteristics of a professional legislature (Grumm 1971; Citizens Conference on State Legislatures 1971). Later, Squire (1992a) developed a variation of that theme by comparing characteristics of state legislatures with those of an institution that was highly professional – the U.S. Congress. Squire’s measure of professionalism, likely the most commonly used measure, compares a state’s legislator compensation, session length, and legislative staffing levels to those of Congress. Generally, different indexes of professionalism correlate highly with each other (Mooney 1994, 1995). Mooney (1985) found that pairwise correlations between indexes developed by Grumm (1971), Morehouse (1983), Bowman and Kearney (1988), and Squire (1992a) ranged from .77 to .87. Despite occasional shifts in an individual state’s level of professionalism, the Squire Index calculated at one time correlates highly with previously calculated measures of professionalism (Squire 2007).

At one point, it looked like the movement to more professional state legislatures was inevitable. In his research, King (2000) identified a trend of increasing professionalism in state legislatures that demonstrated no signs of stopping or reversing itself in the future. However, contrary to King’s expectations, the pace of professionalism has slowed significantly (Squire and Hamm 2005; Kousser 2005; Matsusak 2004). States have started the 21st Century facing significant budgetary and policy challenges, including political opposition to the expansion of legislator compensation and session length and the implementation of term limits for legislators.

The issue that now emerges is whether state legislatures are adequately professionalized to meet the challenges they face. Do legislators have adequate resources to effectively meet the needs of their states? Would legislators spend their time differently if their legislatures were more or less professional? Professionalism's dual role as an independent and dependent variable makes the impact of its institutional characteristics on legislator attitudes and behavior important to understand. Professionalism affects the behavior and attitudes of the same legislators who control the strength of its characteristics through the policies they create. In this study, I measure legislator attitudes towards the adequacy of legislative professionalism in state legislatures and the effects of legislative professionalism on legislator allocation of time. First, I am interested in identifying what factors shape a legislator's evaluation on the adequacy of professionalism found in their legislative body. In the second part, I examine the influence of legislative professionalism on the amount of time that state legislators spend on legislative activities and consider how variations in professionalism correlate with the amount of time that legislators would *like* to spend on different activities.

Professionalism and State Legislatures

Scholars often use professionalism as an independent variable to explain a number of political outcomes. For example, professionalism plays a role in determining the composition of state legislatures. The degree of legislative professionalism influences membership diversity (Squire 1992b), the presence of divided government and party composition (Fiorina 1994; Squire 1997; Stonecash and Agathangelou 1997), incumbent

reelection (Berry, Berkman, and Schneiderman 2000), and membership stability and turnover (Squire 1988; Moncrief, Niemi, and Powell 2004).

Legislative professionalism also shapes legislator behavior, legislative structure, policy outputs, and even the behavior of other political actors. Levels of professionalism are connected to legislator relations with constituents (Squire 1993) and legislative efficiency (Squire 1998). Professionalism also helps influence powers granted to legislative leadership (Richman 2010). The degree of professionalism impacts the willingness to adopt increasingly complex and technical policies (Ka and Teske 2002) and the level of policy responsiveness (Maestas 2000). Legislative professionalism influences the behavior of outside actors, as well, including interest groups (Berkman 2001) and governors (Dilger, Krause, and Moffett 1995). The relationship between professionalism and spending has also been explored with mixed results (Barrilleaux and Berkman 2003). The work of Owings and Borck (2000) finds a positive relationship between professionalism and spending, but a more recent study by Malhotra (2008) calls that finding into question.

While legislative professionalism helps to explain a range of political outcomes, the degree to which a state legislature is professional is also a policy output. State legislative professionalism should be viewed as a willful policy output and examined in terms of legislator views and motivations (Mooney 1995). For example, Malhotra (2008) provides evidence that increased levels of spending lead to more professional legislatures. When the level of legislative professionalism is viewed as a policy output, it becomes important to understand whether legislators find increased professionalism desirable. To achieve this end, I identify the variables that affect legislator attitudes toward

professionalism and attempt to uncover whether the degree of professionalism achieved by a legislature affects how its legislators are able to spend their time.

More specific research identifies some key differences in legislative behavior based on the type of the legislature they serve, and many studies observe the effects of professionalism on legislature-directed and constituency-directed legislator efforts, specifically. Thompson, Kurtz, and Moncrief (1996) found the increased pressures of casework and campaigning to be perceived most strongly by legislators from more professional institutions. This finding is affirmed by Ellickson and Whistler (2001), who report that legislators in more professional legislatures spend more time on casework than legislators from citizen-type legislatures. Hogan (2012) presents the most recent relevant research, which argues that members of less professional legislatures spend more time on legislature-directed efforts, while members of more professional legislatures focus more of their time on constituent-related activities. These studies assert that the degree of legislative professionalism shapes how individual members perform their job and provide support for our further inquiry. Thompson and Moncrief (1992) argue that the degree of legislative professionalism influences the incentive structure and shapes how the individual legislator defines the job. Because the level of professionalism plays a role in establishing a chamber's incentive structure for service, the degree of professionalism will shape the membership of the legislature as well. The degree of legislative professionalism is related to the degree to which legislators are interested in and able to maintain outside careers while in office (Maddox 2004). Professionalism's relation to ambition is important to examine because findings show that legislator levels of ambition for higher office can influence representational activities (Maestas 2003; Hogan 2012).

For example, Herrick and Moore (1993) report that legislators holding such ambitions dedicate more time to floor activity, legislative specialization, and floor activities.

Although a litany of impressive research has been done in this area, there is an obvious gap in the existing research regarding how ambition, party identification, and other factors influence state legislators' views of a need for greater professionalism in their legislatures. This study is my attempt to contribute to this body of literature and hopefully fill that gap in the process. I will proceed in the following manner. First, I will provide a detailed description of the unique survey from which the data for this analysis were drawn. In this chapter, I will explain the technique of survey administration, address potential threats to validity, and provide information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. I will then examine to what extent legislators are satisfied with current levels of legislative professionalism, and test variables that might shape individual legislator support for more professionalism. This will include standard demographic variables, as well as variables such as population and gubernatorial power. That chapter will be followed by a statistical analysis of the influence of professionalism on individual behavior. Specifically, I will test for the relationship between levels of professionalism and how members spend their time and how members would *like* to spend their time performing legislative activities. I will conclude with a discussion of my findings, wherein I will also speculate about their broader meaning.

CHAPTER 2

SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATORS

Data for the present study were obtained from an internet-based survey of legislators in all 50 U.S. states. The primary substantive focus of the survey was legislator attitudes toward legislative professionalism. Additional questions addressed matters such as partisanship, ideology, length of legislative service, attitudes towards aspects of legislative behavior, as well as measures of personality.

Legislators were contacted in September 2010 and asked to complete a self-administered survey. Respondents were assured that the survey was confidential, and no identifying information was obtained. Telephone numbers and email addresses for two of the investigators were provided to respondents; in no instance did a legislator contact an investigator to express concerns regarding confidentiality. Investigators followed up with state legislators on three subsequent occasions to encourage them to complete the survey. Consistent with IRB policy, those contacted were given the option to opt out of future contact regarding the survey at any time.

In all, 7,199 state legislators were contacted, of which 867 participated. This gives us a response rate of roughly 12%. One hundred and eighty-six of the legislators we attempted to contact had published email addresses that were not functional. One hundred and forty legislators opted out of receiving emails about the survey, and thus

declined to participate in the survey, at various points in the data collection process. In addition, we were notified that two of the legislators we attempted to contact were deceased.

Although some scholars would not consider a response rate of 12% to be ideal, I propose two reasons that support the position that, for our purposes, it provides a suitable sample to analyze. First, the motivation for this study supports the idea that response rate is not a key issue. According to Punch (2003), response rates are more important when a researcher is attempting to make generalizations about a larger population and less important if the primary purpose of the researcher is to gain insight. Therefore, if my purpose were to make sweeping assessments regarding the general attitudes of the American public, my response rate could be potentially hazardous. However, because I am simply trying to gain insight on the attitudes of state legislators, my response rate is not a hindrance.

Secondly, existing research supports the notion that because I am examining such a narrow swath of people, a lower response rate is acceptable. In an examination of response tendencies of general practitioners, Templeton et al (1997) found that, on average, attempts to survey these individuals produced relatively low response rates. However, they argued that because this was such a specific group of people, a low response rate did not necessarily exert a negative influence on the validity of the data collected. Given that one could reasonably assume that state legislators are at the very least as select a group as general practitioners, I argue that Templeton et al's (1997) is applicable. The important point to take away is that there is sufficient evidence to

support the idea that the data used for this examination, and the subsequent conclusions drawn from this examination, are valid.

I will now explore some of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Eighty-one percent of respondents are house members, while 19% are state senators. The modal category for tenure is three to six years, although 25% of the sample has served longer than 10 years. Politically speaking, our sample is slightly Democratic, as 54% of respondents self-identify as Democrats while 46% self-identify as Republicans. Ideologically speaking, roughly 48% of respondents self-identify as being at least slightly conservative, around 30% self-identify as at least slightly liberal, and roughly 22% self-identify as ideologically moderate. The respondents' economic and social stances largely support these responses. A majority of respondents consider themselves overwhelmingly conservative on economic issues and slightly conservative on social issues. More than half of respondents think that the quality of their fellow legislators is high and the performance of their respective state legislatures is good. The sample identified K-12 education as the most important issue facing their state, followed closely by taxes.

From a socio-demographic perspective, with regard to gender, 68% of our respondents were male and 32% were female. In terms of racial makeup, 91% self-identified as white, 4% self-identified as African-American, 2% self-identified as Hispanic, and 3% self-identified as "other". Finally, all 50 states were represented in the survey, with New Hampshire having the largest contingent of respondents at 99.¹

¹ New Hampshire having the largest response rate is not surprising, as the New Hampshire state house is the largest state legislative body in the country.

CHAPTER 3

LEGISLATOR ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ADEQUACY OF LEGISLATIVE PROFESSIONALISM

In the first part of this study, I hypothesize that seven variables are likely to influence a legislator's view on the desirability of a more professional legislature. The seven variables include party, ambition for higher office, length of tenure, professionalism of the legislature, gubernatorial power, state population, and gender. Given the context of political discourse from the past decade, the expectation is that Republican lawmakers will be more content with current levels of professionalism than Democratic lawmakers. I anticipate that Republicans will not favor further professionalism because of the greater resources and government expansion it would entail. I expect that those candidates who harbor future electoral ambitions will favor increased professionalism because it earns them greater institutional resources, which provide them with the flexibility to spend more time on activities that will further their respective careers, such as fundraising, giving speeches, and participating in other activities. These activities help to increase their name recognition.

I expect that legislators that have served longer tenures will favor increased professionalism. Because these legislators have settled into positions at the state legislative level, it is likely that these legislators would like these additional resources

to help them be more productive in their current jobs. As gubernatorial power increases, I anticipate legislators will desire greater levels of professionalism. I expect this will be the case because legislators will want the additional resources that increased professionalism brings so that they can lessen the power gap that exists between the legislative and executive branches.

More populous states are hypothesized to have more heterogeneous populations, and, as a result, have more complex political issues that merit greater attention by the legislature. Consequently, legislators from larger states are expected to feel that current levels of professionalism are not adequate to meet the challenges that they face. Because more professional legislatures have greater capacity to fulfill their role in the policy-making process (Mooney 1994), legislators from more professional legislatures are more likely to consider their present levels of professionalism to be adequate. Finally, I included gender as a control variable in the model. Women are more likely than men to report that their legislative jobs are full-time (Kurtz, et al. 2006), and full-time jobs require more resources in order to be more productive. Thus, my expectation is that women will be more likely to express dissatisfaction with current levels of legislative professionalism than men.

Methods

This part of the study utilizes four dependent variables and seven independent variables. The four dependent variables are all dichotomous. The first dependent variable measures whether respondents thought their state legislature currently had an adequate level of professionalism. This variable was coded 0 if respondents thought their

legislature was adequately professional and 1 if respondents thought their legislature was not adequately professional. The second dependent variable measures whether legislators felt they received adequate compensation for the work they do. This variable is coded 0 if respondents believed they were compensated adequately for their work and 1 if respondents believed their level of compensation they received for their work was inadequate. The third dependent variable measures whether legislators were satisfied with the length of their legislative session. This variable was coded 0 if respondents thought the length of their legislative session was adequate and 1 if respondents thought the length of their legislative session was inadequate. The final dependent variable measures whether legislators felt their legislature was adequately staffed. This variable is coded 0 if respondents believed legislative staffing was adequate and 1 if respondents believed legislative staffing was inadequate.

There are seven independent variables observed in this analysis. The first measures the current level of professionalism in each state legislature. This measure is taken from Squire's (2007) work on state legislatures. This variable ranges from a low of .033 to a high of .675, and has a mean of .166. The second independent variable measures gubernatorial power in the state. This variable, which was taken from the work of Beyle (2007), ranges from a low of 2.6 to a high of 4.3, with a mean of 3.48. The next independent variable measures the population of the state. These figures were obtained from U.S. Census data. The fourth independent variable is a dichotomous measure of gender, coded 0 if the respondent was male and 1 if the respondent was female.

Party identification is a dichotomous variable, coded 0 if the respondent is a Democrat and 1 if the respondent is a Republican. The tenure variable measures how

long the respondent has been in office. It is coded 0 if the legislator has served two years or fewer, 1 if the respondent has served between three and six years, 2 if the respondent has served between seven and ten years, and 3 if the respondent has been in office longer than ten years. The final independent variable measures the respondent's level of political ambition. This variable is coded 0 if the respondent has no interest in running for higher office, 1 if the respondent would not rule out pursuing higher office but is not currently interested, 2 if the respondent might run for higher office, and 3 if the respondent is definitely interested in running for higher office.

Results

The models presented in Table 3.1 illustrate the determinants of legislator opinion on the various aspects of legislative professionalism, as well as whether respondents thought their legislature would benefit from increased professionalism. Because the dependent variables are dichotomous, logit models were estimated in each case.

(Insert Table 3.1 here)

The first column in Table 3.1 illustrates the effect of the independent variables on legislator views regarding the potential benefits of increased professionalism on the legislature. The significant negative coefficient operating on party identification indicates that, when the other variables are held constant, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to think that their legislature is adequately professional. The significant negative coefficient operating on the ambition variable indicates that, when the other variables are held constant, respondents who have a higher level of political ambition are more likely to think their legislatures would benefit from increased professionalism.

Gender is positive and statistically significant, which indicates that female legislators are more likely to think their legislature would benefit from increased professionalism. The coefficients for population, gubernatorial power, legislative professionalism, and length of tenure failed to reach statistical significance.

The second column in Table 3.1 illustrates the effect of the independent variables on legislator views regarding the length of the legislative session. The significant negative coefficient operating on party identification indicates that, when the other variables are held constant, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to think that the length of the legislative session is adequate. The significant negative coefficient operating on the length of tenure variable indicates that, when the other variables are held constant, respondents who have served in the legislature for a longer period of time are more likely to think the length of the legislative session is adequate. The political ambition variable is positive and significant, which indicates that more ambitious legislators are more likely to think the length of the legislative session is inadequate. Gubernatorial power is also positive and significant, which indicates that legislators in states with stronger governors are more likely to believe the length of the session is inadequate. The coefficients for population, legislative professionalism, and gender failed to reach statistical significance.

The third column in Table 3.1 illustrates the effect of the independent variables on legislator views regarding staffing. The significant negative coefficient operating on party identification indicates that, when the other variables are held constant, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to think that their legislature is adequately staffed. The significant negative coefficient operating on the professionalism variable indicates that,

when the other variables are held constant, respondents who serve in more professional legislatures are more likely to think their legislature's level of staffing is adequate.

Gender is positive and statistically significant, which indicates that female legislators are more likely to think their legislature's level of staffing is inadequate. The length of tenure variable is also positive and significant, which indicates that legislators who have served for longer periods of time are less likely to feel their legislatures are adequately staffed. The coefficients for population, gubernatorial power, and ambition failed to reach statistical significance.

The final column in Table 3.1 illustrates the effect of the independent variables on legislator views regarding compensation. The significant negative coefficient operating on party identification indicates that, when the other variables are held constant, Republicans are more likely to think they are adequately compensated than Democrats. In addition, the significant negative coefficient operating on the professionalism variable indicates that, when the other variables are held constant, respondents who serve in more professional legislatures are more likely to think the compensation they receive is adequate. Gender is positive and statistically significant, which indicates that women are more likely than men to think their level of compensation is inadequate. The political ambition variable is also positive and significant, which indicates that more ambitious legislators are less likely to feel they are adequately compensated for their work. The coefficients for population, gubernatorial power, and length of tenure failed to reach statistical significance.

Logit coefficients are informative in regard to the direction of, and the statistical significance of, the effect of independent variables. However, they cannot be directly

interpreted in the same way that regression coefficients can and they provide little information regarding substantive impact. Therefore, predicted probabilities were calculated in order to highlight the effect of party identification, gender, length of tenure, ambition, current level of professionalism, and gubernatorial power on support for the various aspects of legislative professionalism.

(Insert Table 3.2 here)

The first column in Table 3.2 indicates that party identification, gender, and ambition exert a significant influence on opinion regarding whether a legislator believes his/her legislature would benefit from more professionalism. When all variables are set at the mean, 38 percent of Democrats believe their legislature would benefit from increased professionalism, as opposed to only 30 percent of Republicans who feel the same way. Forty-three percent of female legislators support increased professionalism, while increased professionalism is only supported by 31 percent of male legislators. Forty-seven percent of those with a high level of ambition are likely to support increased professionalism, while that number drops to 25% among those with a low level of ambition.

The second column in Table 3.2 indicates that party identification, ambition, tenure, and gubernatorial power exert a significant influence on opinion regarding whether a legislator believes his/her legislature would benefit from longer sessions. When all variables are set at the mean, 37 percent of Democrats believe their legislature would benefit from longer sessions, while only 19 percent of Republicans who feel the same way. Thirty-three percent of those who fall into the shortest tenure category support longer sessions, as opposed to 22% of those in the longest tenure category.

Thirty-seven percent of those with a high level of ambition are likely to support longer sessions, while only 22% of those with a low level of ambition would support longer sessions. Finally, 40% of legislators in states with the highest level of gubernatorial power would support longer sessions, while only 19% of legislators support longer sessions in states with the lowest level of gubernatorial power.

The third column in Table 3.2 indicates that party identification, tenure, and level of professionalism exert a significant influence on opinion regarding whether a legislator believes his/her legislature would benefit from more legislative staff. When all variables are set at the mean, 42 percent of Democrats believe their legislature would benefit from additional staff, while only 21 percent of Republicans believe increased staffing would be beneficial. Thirty-six percent of those who fall into the shortest tenure category support increased staffing, as opposed to 28% of those in the longest tenure category. Finally, 44% of legislators in states with a low level of legislative professionalism would support increased staffing, while only 5% of legislators in states with a high level of legislative professionalism believe an increase in staff would be beneficial.

The final column in Table 3.2 indicates that party identification, gender, ambition, and level of professionalism exert a significant influence on opinion regarding whether a legislator believes his/her legislature would benefit from an increase in compensation. When all variables are set at the mean, 66 percent of Democrats believe their legislature would benefit from additional compensation, while only 43 percent of Republicans believe a compensation increase would be beneficial. Fifty-four percent of female legislators support a compensation increase, while 46 percent of male legislators would support such an increase. Sixty-three percent of those with a high level of ambition are

likely to support longer sessions, while 50% of those with a low level of ambition would support longer sessions. The biggest discrepancy across all categories emerges with regard to legislative professionalism, as 66% of legislators in states with a low level of legislative professionalism would support an increase in compensation, while only 5% of legislators in states with a high level of legislative professionalism would support an increase in compensation.

Attitude toward Professionalism by Legislative Characteristics

	Adeq. Professionalized	Session	Staff	Compensation
Constant	-.956 (.695)	-3.135* (.755)	-.269 (.707)	1.831** (.674)
Professionalization	-.137 (1.18)	1.71 (1.20)	-4.234** (1.306)	-3.363** (1.174)
Population	-.002 (.002)	-.001 (.001)	-.002 (.002)	.001 (.002)
Gubernatorial Power	-.001 (.212)	.651** (.228)	.093 (.217)	-.266 (.204)
Party Identification	-.351** (.170)	-.901** (.185)	-.992** (.179)	-.923** (.165)
Gender	.506** (.178)	.124 (.189)	.317** (.181)	.271* (.178)
Ambition	.320** (.093)	.245** (.097)	.102 (.095)	.176** (.090)
Tenure	-.005 (.076)	-.187** (.081)	.126* (.078)	-.092 (.074)
	N=686 LR Chi2=27.8 P>Chi2=.00 Psuedo R2=.03	N=701 LR Chi2=64.1 P>Chi2=.00 Psuedo R2=.08	N=698 LR Chi2=63.7 P>Chi2=.00 Psuedo R2=.07	N=698 LR Chi2=60.3 P>Chi2=.00 Psuedo R2=.06

*p<.10

**p<.05

Standard errors in parentheses

Table 3.1: Attitude toward Professionalism by Legislative Characteristics. This table presents the logit coefficients of the seven independent variables predicted to influence legislator attitudes toward professionalism. These coefficients demonstrate the direction and statistical significance of each variable's influence.

Predicted Probabilities of Support for Various Aspects of Legislative Professionalism				
	More Professionalization	Longer Session	More Staff	Greater Compensation
Republican	30%	19%	21%	43%
Democrat	38%	37%	42%	66%
Male	31%	---	---	54%
Female	43%	---	---	61%
Short Tenure	---	33%	28%	---
Long Tenure	---	22%	36%	---
High Ambition	47%	37%	---	63%
Low Ambition	25%	22%	---	50%
Gub Power High	---	40%	---	---
Gub Power Low	---	19%	---	---
High Professionalized	---	---	5%	18%
Low Professionalized	---	---	44%	66%

Table 3.2: Predicted Probabilities of Support for Various Aspects of Legislative Professionalism. This table presents the predicted probabilities that indicate the substantive impact of political ideology, gender, length of tenure, political ambition, gubernatorial power, and level of professionalism on legislator attitudes toward professionalism.

CHAPTER 4

EFFECTS OF LEGISLATIVE PROFESSIONALISM ON LEGISLATOR ALLOCATION OF TIME

In the second segment of my research, I posit three main hypotheses about the effects of legislative professionalism on legislator allocation of time. The central one states that members of more professional legislatures are more likely to *spend* time performing traditionally legislative activities and are also more likely to *prefer* spending more time performing those activities. In many ways, this hypothesis can be seen as an extension of the argument made by Thompson and Moncrief (1992). The expectation is that the responsibilities associated with serving in a more professional legislature will mean that members from those legislatures will have to spend greater amounts of time performing many legislative activities. Because spending greater time performing legislative activities establishes an incentive structure that some legislators will find more attractive than others, the general expectation is that members of more professional legislatures will be more interested in spending a greater amount of time performing those activities. In summary, members of more professional legislatures will not only spend more time performing many of their legislative activities, but they will also want to be spending time doing them.

While the primary attention of this research centers on the relationship between legislative professionalism and member activity, there are two other hypotheses of significant interest in the second portion of my study. Ambition theory predicts that legislators shape their behavior and work to achieve their long-term objectives (Schlesinger 1966, Hibbing 1993, Herrick 2001). Members with an ambition to seek higher office are more likely to spend time, and would ideally like to spend time, on activities that will help fulfill their ambitions. My third hypothesis centers on the impact of tenure on member allocation of time. As a member's tenure increases, so does his or her incentive structure. Members with lengthy tenures have accrued many of the advantages associated with incumbency, including significant advantages in name recognition. The expectation is that members with longer tenure are more likely to spend time on activities they like to do rather than the ones traditionally required to get elected.

Methods

There are eleven pairs of dependent variables utilized in this analysis. The dependent variables measure both the amount of time and the ideal amount of time that legislators spend engaging in the following common legislative activities: meeting with citizens in their home district, meeting with constituents at the capital, fundraising, participating in committee meetings, meeting at the capital on issues, studying legislation, working on informal causes, participating in floor debates, working to build coalitions, engaging in agency oversight, and giving speeches outside of their district. The questions posed regarding the activities were "How much time do you spend engaging in _____", and "Ideally, how much time would you like to spend engaging in _____". Responses were coded 0 to 3 in both instances, with 0 representing a great deal, 1 representing a

moderate amount, 2 representing a little, and 3 representing almost none. An ordered logit was used to conduct the analysis.

There are eight independent variables used in this analysis. The first measures the current level of professionalism in each state legislature. This measure is taken from Squire's (2007) work on state legislatures. This variable ranges from a low of .033 to a high of .675 and has a mean of .166. The second independent variable measures gubernatorial power in the state. This variable, which was taken from the work of Beyle (2007), ranges from a low of 2.6 to a high of 4.3, with a mean of 3.48. The next independent variable measures the population log of the state. This was calculated from U.S. Census data and accounts for a decline in exponential population growth as a state's population settles and matures. The fourth independent variable is a dichotomous measure of gender, coded 0 if the respondent was male and 1 if the respondent was female. The fifth independent variable is a dichotomous measure of state legislative leadership, coded 0 if the respondent held no type of leadership position in the legislature and 1 if he or she did.

Party identification is a dichotomous variable, coded 0 if the respondent is a Democrat and 1 if the respondent is a Republican. The tenure variable measures how long the respondent has been in office. It is coded 0 if the legislator has served two years or fewer, 1 if the respondent has served between three and six years, 2 if the respondent has served between seven and ten years, and 3 if the respondent has been in office longer than ten years. The final independent variable measures the respondent's level of political ambition. This variable is coded 0 if the respondent has no interest in running for higher office, 1 if the respondent would not rule out pursuing higher office but are not

currently interested, 2 if the respondent might run for higher office, and 3 if the respondent is definitely interested in running for higher office.

Results

Table 4.1 provides insight into how legislators actually spend their time.

(Insert Table 4.1 here)

In this table, the three primary independent variables of interest behave as hypothesized. First, legislators who serve in more professional state legislatures spend significantly more time meeting with citizens in their districts, fundraising, meeting in the capital on issues, and participating in floor debate than those with in legislatures with lowers levels of professionalism. They spend significantly less time working to build coalitions than members who serve in less professional legislatures. No significant difference exists with regard to time spent on any of the other legislative activities between those who serve in more professional and less professional state legislatures.

Legislators who have longer tenure spend their time much differently than those who have not been in office as long. Legislators who have accumulated a lengthier tenure spend significantly less time meeting with citizens in their districts, fundraising, and studying legislation. These legislators are more likely to spend their time meeting at the capital on issues, participating in floor debates, building coalitions, engaging in agency oversight, and giving speeches outside of their district. There is no significant difference with regard to time spent on any of the other legislative activities among those with longer and shorter legislative tenures.

Legislators who have ambition to seek higher office in the future spend significantly more time meeting with citizens in their districts, engaging in agency

oversight, and giving speeches outside of their district than those who are not motivated to seek higher political office in the future. There is no significant difference with regard to time spent on any of the other legislative activities among those with varying levels of political ambition.

Additionally, I find that serving in a leadership capacity puts extra demands on legislators, as leaders are more likely to meet with constituents at the capital, engage in fundraising activities, meet at the capital on issues, give speeches outside of the district, and engage in coalition building. Female state legislators are more likely to participate in committee meetings, meet at the capital on issues, and spend time studying legislation than male state legislators. Also, the only difference that emerges between Republican and Democratic state legislators with regard to how they spend their time is that Democrats show a greater propensity to meet with constituents at the capital than Republicans.

Table 4.2 provides insight into how legislators prefer to spend their time.

(Insert Table 4.2 here)

Again, the three primary independent variables of interest behave as hypothesized. Legislators who serve in more professional state legislatures would like to spend significantly more time meeting with citizens in their districts, meeting with constituents in the capital, fundraising, meeting in the capital on issues, participating in floor debate, and engaging in agency oversight than those with in legislatures with lower levels of professionalism. No significant difference exists with regard to how much time they would like to spend on any of the other legislative activities between those who serve in more professional and less professional state legislatures.

Legislators who have accumulated a lengthier tenure would ideally spend significantly less time meeting with citizens in their districts. These legislators would like to spend more time in committee meetings, participating in floor debates, and giving speeches outside of their district. There is no significant difference with regard to how much time they would like to spend on any of the other legislative activities among those with longer and shorter legislative tenures.

Legislators who have ambition to seek higher office in the future would like to spend significantly more time meeting with citizens in their districts, meeting with constituents at the capital, fundraising, studying legislation, engaging in agency oversight, and giving speeches outside of their district than those who are not motivated to seek higher political office in the future. There is no significant difference with regard to ideal amount of time spent on any of the other legislative activities among those with varying levels of political ambition. In addition to the hypothesized variables of interest, I found that state legislators serving in a leadership capacity would like to spend more time engaging in fundraising activities than rank and file members. Republican state legislators indicate a preference to spend less time in committees, studying legislation, meeting in the capital on issues, working on informal causes, and engaging in coalition building. Female state legislators would like to spend more time in committees, studying legislation, meeting in the capital on issues, and working on informal causes, and less time giving speeches outside of their legislative district.

Amount of Time Spent on Legislative Activities by Legislator Characteristics

	Meet Citizen in Dist.	Meet Cons. at Capital	Fundraising	Committee	Cap. Issues	Study Leg.
Leader	.102 (.434)	-1.044** (.434)	-1.595** (.411)	.152 (.483)	-1.119** (.496)	-.367 (.484)
Professionalism	-2.165** (1.037)	-.818 (.979)	-1.762* (.957)	-1.532 (1.066)	-2.768** (1.013)	-.263 (1.080)
Gub Power	-.214 (.188)	-.350** (.181)	-.111 (.178)	.470** (.201)	.401** (.187)	-.158 (.200)
Party ID	-.246* (.153)	-.243* (.147)	.216 (.146)	.136 (.159)	.150 (.151)	-.079 (.163)
Tenure	.119* (.069)	-.052 (.068)	.215** (.068)	-.014 (.073)	-.174** (.070)	.155** (.074)
Ambition	.219** (.084)	.017 (.081)	.095 (.080)	.067 (.087)	.040 (.083)	.036 (.088)
Gender	.169 (.161)	.133 (.157)	-.170 (.158)	-.599** (.178)	-.406** (.165)	-.618** (.181)
Pop Log	-.326** (.099)	-.348** (.096)	-.412** (.095)	.114 (.104)	.129 (.098)	-.207** (.105)
	N = 700 LR Chi2 = 61.5 P>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .044	N = 699 LR Chi2 = 50.1 P>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .030	N = 694 LR Chi2 = 82.1 P>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .048	N = 694 LR Chi2 = 20.2 P>Chi2 = .0095 Pseudo R2 = .018	N = 701 LR Chi2 = 29.2 P>Chi2 = .0003 Pseudo R2 = .021	N = 698 LR Chi2 = 25.1 P>Chi2 = .0015 Pseudo R2 = .024

*p<.10

**p<.05

Standard errors in parentheses

Table 4.1. Amount of Time Spent on Legislative Activities by Legislator Characteristics. This table presents the logit coefficients of the eight independent variables predicted to influence the eleven dependent legislator behaviors. These coefficients demonstrate the direction and statistical significance of each variable's influence.

Table 4.1 Cont. Amount of Time Spent on Legislative Activities by Legislator Characteristics

	Informal Cause	Floor Debate	Coalition	Oversight	Speech out of District
Leader	-.391 (.426)	-.552 (.489)	-1.765** (.437)	-.338 (.414)	-1.091** (.429)
Professionalism	.494 (.944)	-1.812* (1.038)	2.732** (.926)	-.679 (.933)	-.975 (.934)
Gub Power	.123 (.175)	.390** (.194)	.290* (.176)	.156 (.176)	-.066 (.178)
Party ID	.024 (.144)	-.075 (.155)	.127 (.146)	-.111 (.144)	-.231 (.146)
Tenure	.026 (.066)	-.244** (.072)	-.111* (.067)	-.231** (.067)	-.254** (.068)
Ambition	.038 (.079)	-.010 (.086)	.112 (.081)	.137* (.079)	.419** (.083)
Gender	-.270* (.156)	-.214 (.168)	-.168 (.155)	.035 (.155)	.097 (.155)
Pop Log	-.143 (.092)	.124 (.102)	-.372** (.095)	.073 (.093)	-.285** (.094)
	N = 699 LR Chi2 = 7.3 P>Chi2 = .5001 Pseudo R2 = .004	N = 696 LR Chi2 = 20.3 P>Chi2 = .0092 Pseudo R2 = .015	N = 692 LR Chi2 = 43.3 P>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .025	N = 695 LR Chi2 = 16.9 P>Chi2 = .0308 Pseudo R2 = .010	N = 696 LR Chi2 = 84.4 P>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .049

*p<.10

**p<.05

Standard errors in parentheses

Table 4.1 Cont. Amount of Time Spent on Legislative Activities by Legislator Characteristics

Ideal Amount of Time Spent on Legislative Activities by Legislator Characteristics

	Meet Citizen in Dist.	Meet Cons. at Capital	Fundraising	Committee	Cap. Issues	Study Leg.
Leader	-.110 (.473)	-.577 (.412)	-.692* (.413)	.729* (.441)	-.220 (.461)	.287 (.463)
Professionalism	-3.120** (1.125)	-1.737* (1.007)	-1.775* (.929)	-1.000 (1.021)	-2.055** (1.013)	-1.312 (1.072)
Gub Power	-.229 (.195)	-.346* (.181)	-.010 (.179)	.401** (.195)	.344* (.191)	-.150 (.198)
Party ID	.250 (.160)	.038 (.149)	-.068 (.145)	.398** (.154)	.378** (.154)	.289* (.161)
Tenure	.176** (.073)	-.012 (.069)	.108 (.068)	-.130* (.071)	-.059 (.071)	-.001 (.074)
Ambition	.331** (.089)	.206** (.082)	.221** (.081)	.039 (.084)	.119 (.084)	.145* (.089)
Gender	.073 (.170)	.090 (.159)	.213 (.157)	-.403** (.167)	-.603** (.166)	-.513** (.178)
Pop Log	-.211** (.103)	-.129 (.095)	-.169* (.092)	.181* (.100)	.081 (.101)	.067 (.103)
	N = 701 LR Chi2 = 70.4 P>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .060	N = 699 LR Chi2 = 35.9 P>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .023	N = 698 LR Chi2 = 38.5 P>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .024	N = 697 LR Chi2 = 25.8 P>Chi2 = .0011 Pseudo R2 = .021	N = 700 LR Chi2 = 30.8 P>Chi2 = .0002 Pseudo R2 = .024	N = 699 LR Chi2 = 21.3 P>Chi2 = .0065 Pseudo R2 = .020

*p<.10

**p<.05

Standard errors in parentheses

Table 4.2. Ideal Amount of Time Spent on Legislative Activities by Legislator Characteristics. This table presents the predicted probabilities that indicate the substantive impact of the eight independent variables on legislator behaviors.

Table 4.2 Cont. Ideal Amount of Time Spent on Legislative Activities by Legislator Characteristics

	<u>Informal Cause</u>	<u>Floor Debate</u>	<u>Coalition</u>	<u>Oversight</u>	<u>Speech out of District</u>
Leader	-.507 (.425)	-.120 (.445)	-.282 (.431)	-.171 (.431)	-.314 (.390)
Professionalism	.197 (.959)	-2.445** (1.015)	-.176 (.967)	-1.935** (.968)	-1.394 (.933)
Gub Power	.001 (.182)	.377** (.187)	.066 (.182)	.090 (.180)	.009 (.175)
Party ID	.300** (.149)	.041 (.150)	.408** (.149)	-.092 (.147)	-.105 (.145)
Tenure	.036 (.068)	-.181** (.069)	.061 (.067)	-.092 (.068)	-.164** (.067)
Ambition	.103 (.081)	.089 (.082)	.107 (.082)	.278** (.082)	.466** (.083)
Gender	-.350** (.159)	-.158 (.162)	-.294* (.158)	-.005 (.158)	.155** (.155)
Pop Log	-.023 (.095)	.260** (.098)	-.252** (.097)	.055 (.095)	.018 (.091)
	N = 695 LR Chi2 = 14.4 Prob>Chi2 = .0715 Pseudo R2 = .009	N = 696 LR Chi2 = 17.0 Prob>Chi2 = .0300 Pseudo R2 = .013	N = 698 LR Chi2 = 29.9 Prob>Chi2 = .0002 Pseudo R2 = .019	N = 698 LR Chi2 = 19.4 Prob>Chi2 = .0128 Pseudo R2 = .013	N = 691 LR Chi2 = 58.6 Prob>Chi2 = 0.000 Pseudo R2 = .033

*p<.10

**p<.05

Standard errors in parentheses

Table 4.2. Ideal Amount of Time Spent on Legislative Activities by Legislator Characteristics. This table presents the predicted probabilities that indicate the substantive impact of the eight independent variables on legislator behaviors.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results from the previous two chapters help fill a gap in research by providing a sense of how legislators feel about the degree of professionalism in their legislature and expand on existing research regarding professionalism's effect on legislator allocation of time. This information is particularly relevant since legislators are typically among those that have the ability to change the institutional characteristics of a legislative body.

While most legislatures fall far short of the U.S. Congress in terms of professionalism, there is not an overwhelming sense that legislatures lack the institutional capacity to fulfill their policy-making responsibilities and address the many challenges they face. The legislators' observed sense of contentment with current levels of professionalism suggests that the amount of time currently allocated to their legislative activities will not be changing drastically in the near future. The major conclusions from each substantive chapter of this paper are presented below. They will be followed by a brief discussion of their implications on legislative professionalism and possible future directions for this line of research.

Legislator Attitudes Toward the Adequacy of Legislative Professionalism

The clear lesson from the first half of our research is that political (party) and personal (ambition) factors play the primary roles in shaping how legislators view the

adequacy of professionalism in their legislatures. These factors trump institutional characteristics such as gubernatorial power and legislative professionalism. In this regard, our findings support those of Hogan (2012). In particular, party identification exerts a significant influence on all aspects of legislative professionalism, as there is a significant difference between Republicans and Democrats with regard to their views on staffing, compensation, session length, and whether their legislature would benefit from increased professionalism. This is consistent with our expectations and suggests the presence of a philosophical divide over the scope of legislative professionalism. The divide between how Republicans and Democrats view the need for legislative professionalism likely played a greater role in the plateauing of the professionalism revolution than did any consensus that legislatures had become adequately professional.

The consistent performance of the ambition variable provides evidence that legislators who expressed the greatest interest in advancing their political careers also had an interest in creating a legislature that would best help them meet those goals. Increased session length and compensation would help facilitate their goals of pursuing careers in politics. Institutional factors seem to be secondary to personal and political factors in shaping how legislators view legislative professionalism. Increased session length was the only dependent variable for which gubernatorial strength was significant. This suggests that legislators see the part-time nature of the legislature relative to the full-time executive as the greatest disadvantage they face when competing with the executive branch. Also interesting is that population does not have an effect on legislative professionalism. One would expect that legislatures in states with a larger population would be more professional in order to better handle the more diverse set of demands

present by the residents of that state. Surprisingly, we find that to not necessarily be the case.

Another interesting finding from this analysis is the fact that legislators are largely satisfied with the level of professionalism in their legislature. Aside from being dissatisfied with the level of financial compensation they receive, legislators generally expressed satisfaction with regard to the other aspects of institutional professionalism. This runs contrary to conventional wisdom, as one would expect a higher level of dissatisfaction given that, in many instances, it is necessary for legislators to put in half-time, or even full-time, work with only a part-time legislative support system in place.

While it is important not to overreach, the results here do suggest that, at least in the near future, the degree of professionalism is going to be shaped by partisan perspective and philosophical difference on the nature of professionalism rather than the need to become professional or not. This study also suggests that there is more we can learn from legislators and the impact of legislative professionalism. It would be particularly interesting to learn more about to what extent legislators from more professional legislatures spend their time and priority policy relative to members of less professional chambers.

The Impact of Legislative Professionalism on Legislator Allocation of Time

The question that arose at the end of the conclusion above led to the second half of this study. How legislators spend their time, and how they would ideally like to spend their time, is one of the most important topics of discussion for observers of contemporary legislative politics. Our research attempts to shed light on this subject. We argued that legislative professionalism, length of tenure, and ambition to seek higher

office exert a significant influence with regard to how legislators spend their time as well as to how they would like to spend their time. Our findings have largely supported our argument.

First, I discovered that, generally speaking, members of more professional state legislatures spent more time performing traditionally legislative activities and expressed that they would like to spend even more time performing those activities. Essentially, the level of professionalism that exists in a legislature shapes membership, as legislators in more professional legislatures have more time to do things that they enjoy doing and spend less time performing activities they do not want to do. For instance, they are able to spend more time meeting with citizens in their districts and participating in floor debates and less time working on building coalitions than legislators in less professional legislatures.

In addition, members with an eye on higher office spend time, and would ideally like to spend more time, on activities that will help them fulfill their ambitions. When one examines how these legislators spend their time, it is clear that these legislators are focusing their efforts on activities that will reinforce their name recognition within their district (meeting citizens in their district) and expand their name recognition outside of their district (participating in agency oversight and giving speeches outside of their district). With regard to how they would ideally like to spend their time, these ambitious legislators would also like to meet constituents at the capital and fundraise – activities which would again reinforce name recognition – and study legislation, which would make them a more knowledgeable, and theoretically more impressive, legislator.

Finally, we found that members that have accumulated longer tenure, and are thus more electorally secure, are able to spend more time engaging in the legislative activities they enjoy doing and less time in the activities they do not like to do. For example, they are able to spend more time participating in floor debates, building coalitions, engaging in agency oversight, giving speeches outside of their district, and meeting in the capital on issues. Because they have built up name recognition over time, they can afford to spend less time performing activities that more junior legislators would have to do, such as meeting citizens in their district and engaging in fundraising.

There are four obvious extensions to this line of research. The first step would be to determine if there are any psychological characteristics of these legislators that influence how they spend their time, or how they would like to spend their time. The second extension would be to separate out legislators from various parts of the country to determine if regional effects exert any influence on legislative behavior. A third improvement would be to separate activities into legislature-directed and constituent-directed efforts to provide more specific results that align with the recent studies within the field. A final extension would involve deploying the survey again at multiple points in the future and conducting a time-series analysis to determine if professionalism, tenure, and ambition hold up as consistent predictors of how legislators like to spend their time over time.

APPENDIX

SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATORS

1. What is your party identification?

Democrat Republican

2. How many years have you served in the state legislature?

2 or fewer 3-6 7-10 More than 10

3. Do you believe the compensation received by legislators in your state is adequate or inadequate?

Adequate Inadequate

4. Do you believe the number of days your legislature spends in session is adequate or inadequate?

Adequate Inadequate

5. Do you believe the number of staff working in your state is adequate or inadequate?

Adequate Inadequate

6. Do you believe your state legislature is adequately professionalized, or would your state benefit from having a more professionalized legislature?

Adequately Professionalized Would benefit from more professionalized legislature

7. What is your gender?

Male Female

8. Which best describes your attitude toward seeking higher office in the future?

I would definitely like to run for higher office in the future

I might run for higher office in the future if the opportunity presented itself

I would not completely rule out running for higher office in the future, but am currently not interested

I would absolutely never run for higher office in the future

9. Do you serve in a leadership capacity in your state's legislature?

Yes

No

10. How much time do you spend engaging in _____?

A great deal

A moderate amount

A little

Almost none

Activities asked about:

Meet Citizen in District
Committee

Work on Informal Causes
Agency Oversight

Meet Constituents at Capital
Meet at Capital on Issues

Floor Debate
Speech out of District

Fundraising
Study Legislation
Build Coalitions

10. Ideally, how much time would you like to spend engaging in _____?

A great deal

A moderate amount

A little

Almost none

Activities asked about:

Meet Citizen in District
Committee

Work on Informal Causes
Agency Oversight

Meet Constituents at Capital
Meet at Capital on Issues

Floor Debate
Speech out of District

Fundraising
Study Legislation
Build Coalitions

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